

# THE BANNER SERIES OF SELECTED SHORT STORIES

## A Night With Whispering Smith.

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN.  
(Copyright by S. S. McClure & Co.)

talk quick," explained Whispering Smith. "We just want to know where you got that bill you bet on Night Express in the Gravesend. Free-for-all this afternoon. Night Express won; there was a mistake in the wire. There's a good bit of money coming to you if it's straight; but Gus Harris here, who took the bet—you remember him, don't you? Yes. Gus heard the bill was swiped with a roll a gentleman lost in the cafe to-day. I belong to the detective squad at the Parker. Tell him where you got the bill, Charlie. If it's straight you're entitled to your money, and I'll see that you get your bet. If you swiped it we want the rest of the roll. It was a five-to-one shot, Harris says, which would make you winner five hundred on Night Express, and I guess from what Wes Van Horn says, she won. H'm?"

"Who says I swiped it?" "Nobody," he said. "It's right out. The black-haired fellow that works at the fast chair in the barber shop downstairs claimed he could tell more about it if you didn't. I told these boys we'd hear what you had to say first. Boys, am I right?" "I didn't swipe no money from nobody." "I never thought of it. Where did you get it?" "I made dat det'r a friend o' mine. If it's won d' stuff for his'n."

"Exactly." "He'll me de money to put up beto' yeste'day, and I neva bet it till yeste'day." "The way it's turned out it's a good bet. Give me a match, Charlie," said Whispering Smith. "Am I right, Gus? It was a good bet. Thanks, Charlie. Now, who's your friend?"

"The fellow that gave you the money." "I'll never tell y' dat." "Why not?" "Cause I said I wouldn't."

"Oh, yes, you will," observed Whispering Smith, pleasantly.

"Y' can arres' me of you want. Y'll never get n'thin' out o' me, boss."

"How'll y' do it?" "We'll pound the life out of you, Charlie."

The mulatto reached for his revolver. The men grappled. Harris, a dead game sport, shut the door with a bang; Whispering Smith rained a perfectly frightful shower of blows on the head of the obstinate darkey. Outside the landlord hammered on the door; the tout stuck a pistol in his face, and swore he would shoot him if he entered. "It looked like a riot."

"Darkies are hard to work on a time limit," panted Whispering Smith, standing over his man a minute later. "Now, Charlie, behave yourself," he continued. "Here's a towel; but you mustn't monkey. I'll kill you before I quit you without the name. We ain't going to arrest you; we ain't going to fool with you; and you'll only get pounded worse if you hold it up on us. Here's the money you swiped—see?" and Whispering Smith held up the Treasury note before the dazed eyes of the colored man, whom he helped to sit down on the bed. "Give me the name and I'll count out an even \$100. Don't be a clam."

"He'll kill me if I give him up."

"If he does you'll die rich, Charlie. If you take me now I'll make it \$250, and in big bills. You needn't be afraid of the fellow, because I shall pinch him right off, anyway."

"Give me two-fifty."

"G'f me the name, you blackguard; my word is good for ten times that. Gus, count \$250 out of that roll," said Whispering Smith, wiping one hand on the shoulder of his victim, while with the other he passed Harris a handful of money.

"It's Oliver Ames; g'f me de money."

"What did I tell you?" asked Whispering Smith calmly, appealing to me. "Is he on days or nights now, Charlie? Give him the \$250, Gus. It's all right. So it's Oliver Ames?"

"Do you know him?"

"Of course I do; and Gus, you just step outside the door a minute and pacify that landlord, will you? Where's Oliver working now?"

At the Richelieu?



"Who Says I Swiped It?"

get your moustache curled, and you'll pass without introduction."

### II.

At midnight, a little gay for a corporation lawyer, I followed Whispering Smith into the bathroom. When we got downstairs the badly wanted gambler was in the Turkish asleep. Whispering Smith gave certain instructions to the attendant, and we took a cab to Boyle's chop-house for the gambler, Van Horn.

"Wesley, shake hands with Alderman Lyman," said Whispering Smith as we approached. "You never told me, Wesley, whether you were any relation of Hi Van Horn, who ran the privileges at the Casino the year of the World's Fair?"

"Does he owe you anything?"

"Nothing but gratitude."

"He's no relation of mine; but he owed me \$400 when he quit the town. I'm glad to see you, Mr. Lyman, and Mr. Smith. What will you have?"

"Thank you; we're just from supper. I want you to go over with me to talk to Harris, Wes. By the way—and it's often occurred to me to ask you, and I never could think of it—were you named after John Wesley or Charles?" asked Whispering Smith amiably.

"I wasn't named after either."

"No."

"No. I was named after a camp meeting. Well, if you won't eat and won't drink, smoke."

"But we don't smoke," persisted Whispering Smith in bright-eyed gratitude.

"Then let's go hunt up Harris. What's the row anyway, Whispering?"

"It's like this. My friend here is in your line."

"How's that?"

"He's a collector of stamps, Wesley; yes. Just now he's looking up some large stamps that are pretty scarce, and he's helping him out on his collection—and, incidentally, adding a few to his own," continued Whispering Smith, lowering his tone modestly. "Yes."

Which parable Wesley understood without further parley. The three of us broke together into the Richelieu baths about 1 o'clock. Harris, the tout, was in the barber's chair.

"Gus," said Van Horn, "these are friends of ours—Alderman Lyman, Whispering Smith. You turned in a \$100 bill to-night?"

"And six fifties," sparkled Harris between his teeth. "There was only nine-sixty on the whole book. It was light—light."

"That isn't it. These folks want to know who passed the bill. It's a counterfeit, and I'm stuck. It doesn't come out of you—but we want the guy that did us, see?"

Harris looked at Van Horn and at Smith, and at my ascot.

"A con?"

"A con?" I stammered.

"A con; and I took the notice because I seen him once before. G'f me a cigar, Van. It's a con; say, I'll nail him—he's out there every day. A coney, eh?"

"A con is a hoodoo on me every time," observed Whispering Smith softly. "What's his name?"

"Name? Them fellows never have no name," scoffed Harris, lighting his cigar scornfully as he stepped out of the barber chair, stretched himself, and looked at his watch. "One o'clock, ain't it?"

"But you've seen him," urged Whispering Smith indignantly.

"Why here, Wes," exclaimed Harris, turning suddenly and pointing his cigar at Van Horn. "Of course, I seen him. You seen him. It's the con that takes the hats at the Parker House Cafe—that's where I seen him."

"That light chocolate con?" muttered Van Horn.

"Light chocolate," repeated Whispering Smith softly. "And I'll bet \$100 I don't know him, for I always eat in the restaurant upstairs. That comes of being exclusive, Gus. If you've got an hour to spare, let's hunt him up. I've got a wheat deal on hand to-morrow, and I'd rather do it now."

The tout looked at Van Horn. "Of course," nodded the bookmaker, "you'd do anything for a friend of mine." "Then we'll turn you loose right here, Wes," suggested Whispering Smith briskly, "and I'm yours truly, Gus. Let's get started."

With Harris in hand we found the night clerk at the Parker, and we got the address of the cafe attendant. It took us three days in a hansom to Dearborn and Twenty-sixth Streets. Our search brought us to a flat. We roused a sleepy landlord, but Whispering Smith, by a liberal bribe, got admission. After two awkward mistakes we roused out the boy, Charlie Sutherland, who, Harris declared, had passed the note.

"What you fellows want?" asked the mulatto, sitting up in bed as Whispering Smith lit the gas.

"Nothing at all, Charlie, if you're good-natured and

the door slightly open. I caught at once the whiff of an anaesthetic. It might have been three minutes later that I heard the scratch of a match and the faint puff of the gas as Whispering Smith cautiously lit it. He beckoned me in and closed the door. On the bed I saw a small man lying in his shirt sleeves.

Throwing off his coat, the detective began searching the room with the utmost energy and thoroughness. There was scant furniture to impede him. He ripped the carpet edges and felt along the baseboard for dummy pockets; he went through the bureau and even into the upholstered chair. Then grabbing the coverlet under the sleeping bell-boy he motioned to me. I took the other end, and we lifted the fellow to the floor. The detective, with a superb confidence in the anaesthetic, removed the pillow, shook a pistol free under it, opened the cylinder, emptied the cartridges into his pocket, and placed the revolver in the bureau. He slipped up the woolen pillow, ran his knife along the edge of the excelsior mattress, peered inquisitively at Mr. Oliver Ames for a few seconds, and tackled him.

Just as he rolled Oliver on his back there was a rap at the door. Before I could move I saw in Whispering Smith's hand the glitter of a knife as he sprang to the gas and blew it out before anyone at the door could open.

"The door," said the detective, standing at the foot of the iron bed, I grasped the rail in a cold sweat. "It's Collier—no, there, Ames?"

I heard the scrape of a match as Smith lit the gas. "Why didn't you rap twice, Dave?" he asked, as the house officer of the Richelieu entered the room. "Exactly sure you were here; didn't get your message exactly straight. What's the racket?"

Smith unlocked the door behind Collier, and without answering dropped on his knees again beside Ames. Ripping his clothes with a deftness that would be dangerous in a crowd, Gordon Smith turned out no end of stuff, among other effects a roll of bills from an inside vest pouch. These he ran hurriedly over. They were all small—fives and twos and ones.

He replaced and buttoned the sleeping man's vest. He turned things absolutely inside out, and without so far as I could see, any results.

"That's all," he said briefly. "Help me lift him, Collier. No; take hold of the spread and drop him hard." As we had lowered him, they raised him and dropped him with a jolt on the bed. Then Smith took hold of his arms and jerked him awfully with violence. After that he lowered the gas down to a glimmer. I smelt ammonia; it came from close under Oliver's nostrils.

"Now, let's break in on him. His gun is empty, Dave," whispered Gordon Smith, motioning us to the door. He stepped to the gas-burner, turned it on full, looked an instant on the bell-boy, and, reversing the cock, left us in darkness. Collier, meanwhile, pounded the door.

"Hi, there! Ames! Oliver! Hi! Wake up! Open up here. Hello, why the door's open," exclaimed Collier, throwing it ajar with a bang.

"Hello, Ollie!" he roared, advancing toward the gas jet as he struck a match. Gordon Smith pushed me behind the door, and the two advanced to the bed. I saw Whispering Smith put his hand on the sleeper's shoulder. The first rational move the bell-boy made was to reach under his pillow.

"Tut! Tut! Hold on, Oliver; hold on," urged Collier, putting his fingers patronizingly over the muzzle of the revolver as the trigger snapped viciously. "We're all friends here."

"All friends," echoed Whispering Smith. "Ollie, sit up; wake up. That's right; open up. Put down your gun; those automatic firing pins are a fraud, anyway."

"What you fellows after?" spoke Oliver Ames, with a bite of savagery.

"Why, Oliver, I'm sorry to say we're after you. Now sit still," persisted Gordon Smith, as the victim started to cover him with a revolver. "Don't try to shoot that at me. I mean you well, my boy. It's the difficulty of passing the big bills that has brought us here; that's all. The big bills gave you away. Now sit still."

"What you talking about?" sputtered Oliver with a forcible interjection and an awful pull on his disordered faculties.

Talking about the way big bills trip a man, Ollie. I want to say first of all there's no disposition to be hard on you."

"I've heard that kind o' stuff."

"Very likely."

"Yo' can't bluff me."

"We don't have to. We've got you dead. Even your pistol is hoodooed. Now tell me where you got the idea of hiding part of it in the lining of your cap." Whispering Smith looked from Ames to Collier and back again with amiable amusement, as he held up a cap for their inspection. "And who ever heard of carrying your cap in your inside vest pocket? Still, a man would never guess from looking at that cap that I had just ripped six \$100 bills out of the lining, Oliver." The bell-boy started frenziedly. "Ollie, it's all up, I tell you," persisted Whispering Smith. "I've got the money and I want a lot more of it. Here are seven of the bills, and to my amazement Whispering Smith certainly did produce that much of the missing money."

"Where's the rest of it, Oliver?" asked Whispering Smith. Oliver hesitated; then went to pieces.

"I spent it," he growled.

"Why, no, Oliver—not all. You haven't been buying any hotels or anything, son; not hotels?"

"I bought Paris Mutuels."

"How many?"

"Three hundred. I only got ten."

"Only ten—well, there's all to us, Oliver; the whole thing. It's your best play."

"I been waitin' on him for a year."

"I see."

"Taking up cocktails and flats and splits and running errands."

"I thought you said he didn't drink, Collier," observed Whispering Smith reproachfully.

One night I was bringing up some vichy, continued Oliver Ames, "and I opened de door and I didn't lock it, and he was over at de mantelpiece, and he turned on me like a cyclone, and began a-cursin' me for comin' in wid-out knocking. And I says to myself, 'All right, my buck, you've got stuff hid dere,' and next day I got a pass-key, rubbed till I raised de dough, stuck in a crack nex' the chimney. Maybe he wasn't red-headed for a month, an' never squealed for a good while, I'm a-guessin', neber."

"Not for a good while; that's dead right, Ollie. Go on."

"What's to go on?"

"About the rest of it."

"You got it dere in your hand. I got all he had."

"Who had?"

"Dr. Mercer."

"Dr. Mercer," echoed Whispering Smith. "Ollie, the doctor, I may say, isn't disposed to be hard on you. Collier will, I may say, keep an eye on you till we get things straightened out. Dave, we'll leave you right here with the boy. Come, Mr. Lyman."

Whispering Smith, walking like a pacer, led the way to the Richelieu. We climbed the stairs to my room. As I lit the gas, Whispering Smith locked the door behind him and broke the long silence.

"It's up to Mercer."

"I'm going right after him."

"I'll wait here."

"No; you'll have to come," said Whispering Smith positively. "You must rap him up; when he opens I will talk."

"What does it mean?" I asked myself every step of the way to the Doctor's door. How I ever forced myself to rap there in the dead of the morning marvels me yet.

"It's Mercer, Doctor," said understandingly as Mercer spoke from within. "Open a minute, will you?"

"Just a minute." It seemed ten minutes before the door opened.

"What's wrong, Mr. Mercer? Collywobbles?" asked the Doctor, peering out.

"Not exactly, and yet you might call it that, Doctor," interposed Whispering Smith. "I'm the one, Doctor. Let me sit down." So saying he shoved the whole scene into chairs in the Doctor's sitting-room.

"I've been spending the night with Mr. Mercer. I wouldn't have bothered him to come and introduce me if it had been at any other hour," began Whispering Smith.

"A sick man doesn't need any introduction," observed the Doctor, as he sat facing us in his trousers and slippers.

"Sorry to disturb you, anyway. But, Doctor, you may not remember I called on you once in behalf of the Guardian Safety Deposit Vault."

"Yes."

"Spoke about the Fuller robbery."

"I don't quite get you," said Dr. Mercer.

"My very difficultly heretofore, Doctor," smiled Gordon Smith, "but it looks different now. In the first place, we have got the man who robbed you."

There was a pause before Dr. Mercer retorted; yet to me his face told nothing beyond ordinary surprise.

"Who's been robbing me?"

"Your bell-boy."

"I wasn't aware of it."

"That's curious, now; especially as he touched you for ten \$100 bills at one time. Here they are, Doctor—at least, seven of them—and three have gone the way."

Whispering Smith stepped forward, told the bills one after another truly over and put them at Dr. Mercer.

"They don't belong to me," said Dr. Mercer.

"I know they don't. They belong to Colonel Fuller, but they came from here, Doctor." Speaking, he stepped to the mantel, and as if by instinct put his hand under the chink in the slab. "Right from this crack."

"Is this man's?" demanded Dr. Mercer, turning to me; but his face was setting into paste.

"To put it bluntly, Doctor, I want you to explain," said Whispering Smith.

"I can't explain a pipe-dream, my poor fellow. What you need is rest."

"I know it. What makes me tired is to have to push you so far. Explain to me why you run two different boxes at two different safety vaults under two different names?"

It seemed to drive the iron clear through the Doctor. He sat for an instant transfixed; then he stouted a defiance—only, too loud.

"I don't explain my business to every lunatic that breaks into my room at midnight. Get out of here."

Whispering Smith appeared hurt. "Don't you understand? You are under arrest."

Mercer started.

"I will stay with you, Doctor, until 9 o'clock; then I want you to go to your boxes with me and open 4072 at the Western National vaults and 1018 at the Guardian. It's brutal—I know it; but I can't help that, Doctor. It's up to you."

Something in the detective's words froze the dumfounded physician. "Morse," he asked nervously, "what does this mean?"

"What does it mean, Doctor?" I echoed, steadying my voice as I could. "For God's sake, what does it mean?"

"You will ruin my reputation by such crazy proceedings. What recourse have I after I'm disgraced? If you arrest me I am ruined. Now I appeal to you. I am as innocent of this charge as a baby. I am innocent, Morse, for God's sake have some consideration for me! I tell you, there's not a shred of evidence against me."

Whispering Smith stared at the ceiling.

"Doctor," said I, "if you are innocent no one will be gladder to see it than I. The case is, and has been, in this man's hands from the day it opened. Tell him everything you know, and tell it now. It is impossible for your best friend to advise you more sincerely."

Dr. Mercer sat frozen. Then of a sudden he started to his feet. Both of us, I think, saw the strange expression on his face.

"I swear as innocent as a baby," he cried. "If you are determined to ruin me."

"Now don't talk shop," whispered the detective. "See here; if you're innocent, give Mr. Morse the keys to your boxes now. Meet us at the Guardian Vaults at 9 o'clock. No one need know you are a suspect. It will save searching your room."

"I'll do it," said Mercer calmly. His mood had changed. "The keys. There they are." He took from his pocket a waiter's napkin and picked two keys; handed them to me; his finger touched mine; it was like lightning.

"You are not to leave your rooms until you are ready to go to the vaults, Doctor. Nine o'clock."

Dr. Mercer stared at him. "Nine o'clock," he repeated, vaguely. I well remember the words.

Whispering Smith, detailing one of Collier's men at the door of the 508 suite, followed to my room and threw himself on the couch. I sent for coffee, but he was asleep before it arrived. A cupful was hardly necessary to keep me awake till day. At breakfast I barely tasted food. Whispering Smith ate for a time with apparent unconcern. Then of a sudden he threw down his paper, looked spryly at me, passed his napkin across his lips, and pushed his chair from the table. "By George, I'll be back in a minute," he exclaimed, rising. "Sit still."

For five minutes I sat alone. A man walking rapidly into the dining-room came straight to my chair.

"Mr. Smith would like to see you quick at 508," he whispered.

I caught the elevator and made my way around into the 508 corridor, Collier's man behind me. Whispering Smith stood with Dave, his ear at the door.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I've made a mistake."

"He's gone?"

"No. I shouldn't have left him alone. Just the same, I shouldn't have left him alone. Doctor," he called, as loud as his ragged throat would carry; "open up or I'll smash you in. Without another word he ran to the end of the corridor. I heard a crash of glass, and in a moment he was back with a fireman's axe.

"Stop!" said I. "Would he shoot through the door?"

"He has no pistol."

"If he comes, do you know everything?"

"It's my business. Get back, will you? Stand clear there."

He swung the axe like a sledge and sunk it into the oak. Again he landed on the knob and on the bolt; the door gave and he ran into the room. The blinds were closed, the shade drawn. Whispering Smith sprang to the window, tore the shade from the roller and jerked open the blinds.

"The blinds," said he, trying the bedroom door, "and locked in. Give me the axe, Foley. Get that crowd of rubbernecks out of the hall. Damn it, shut the door!"

Without looking to see his orders executed, Whispering Smith smashed at the inner door. As it gave way he caught the knob. I pushed forward, but he held me back.

"Don't take any unnecessary chances. Just a second."

While Foley kept the mob in the hall, Whispering Smith pushed into the gloom of the inner apartment; a moment later an electric button under the lamp in the room. Kneeling across a chair, almost at the feet of the little detective as he turned from the switch key I saw the figure of a man, his head fallen over the side of the chair between his arms. Whispering Smith, stooping, lifted his head, but he dropped it with a start; it almost parted from the body. Stepping behind and catching the shoulders, he lifted the head back. The face was Mercer's. He had cut his throat.

Whispering Smith, like a whirlwind, inventoried the room. He had the whole story a minute later, when he handed me a note, incoherent in terms, but addressed to me, saying that the missing money was in the Western National Deposit Vault.

There, an hour later, we found in the safe rented by Mercer, not six inches from Fuller's empty